

Leonard. F.

Witches and Wizards

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WITCHES AND WIZARDS.

OF all beliefs, prevalent in the middle ages, perhaps the strangest was that in witchcraft.

That women and men could have unholy compacts with the devil, and could cause injury to mortal creatures, nay, if left unchecked, could have brought an end to the world, were beliefs so firmly established, that for centuries Catholic and Protestant pursued witches and wizards with fire and water, to such an extent that thousands of human beings fell victims to the holocaust of extermination. "The Clergy had not enough funeral piles, the people enough insults, the children enough stones for the unfortunate ones. . . . At the word 'witch,' one imagines the terrible old women of Macbeth, but their cruel trials show the contrary. Many perished precisely because they were young and beautiful." (1)

Were she (the accused) ugly, *eo ipso*, she was a witch; were she young and beautiful, then also was she a witch, because the devil had conferred beauty on his paramour. And finally, were she pious and attended Church, then her piety was simulated in order to deceive. "*Amicos se simulant peioris sunt hostibus apertissimis.*" "I find in the list of Wurtzburg, one witch of 11 years, who was at school, a witch of 15 at Bayonne, two of seventeen—very pretty." (2).

No less than six hundred witches perished in the bishopric of Bamberg alone, within 3 months; the Inquisition caused 30,000 to be burnt within a century and a half, and from the bull of Pope Innocent VIII. it is estimated that 300,000 witches were immolated. Whence came this extraordinary belief in witchcraft, and how was it that men of such diverse views as Charles V., Luther, Erasmus, Carpozov, Baxter, and Sir Thomas Browne, were of opinion that witchcraft existed, and should be stamped out, and looked on approvingly at the methods employed?

How was it that the "Witch-finder" General Hopkins, "pricked, waked, and swam hundreds of unhappy women in the eastern counties of England; that Major Weir was strangled and burnt at Edinburgh in 1670 for sorcery; that an old nun was burnt as a witch at Wurzburg so late as 1749, and to come nearer our own

1. Michelet "La Sorcière."
2. Michelet "La Sorcière."

day, that five witches were burnt at St. Jacob in Mexico in 1877?

It arose from a dread fear of the power of the devil.

Michelet says it arose from "despair, a dread uncertainty of what was going to happen in the world, in the Middle Ages." An enormous void was made in the world. Who would fill it? The Christians say the demon, everywhere the demon: "*Ubique daemon*."

But, to adequately answer the question, volumes would be required, and here it will be sufficient to recognise that a witch mania did once, in fact, exist, and to ascertain some particulars as to the classification of witches, their compacts, supposed crimes, trials, confessions, and deaths. No lack of material is wanting, as witch literature is extremely voluminous. "Read the execrable registers (that remain to us) of the Inquisition. Read them in their platitude, their full dryness, so terribly savage; at the end of some pages you feel chilled. Death, death, death is in every line. The horror is *in pace*. Those words return unceasingly, like an abominable bell that is rung and re-rung, always the same words, *Immured*." (3)

Chaldea was the original home of the wizard and the astrologer, the eastern nations being peculiarly partial to the occult and the mysterious. Jins and magicians float through the "*Arabian Nights*," magic is met with in the Bible—at the Court of Pharaoh—and the Witch of Endor fulfils her destiny.

The Romans had their soothsayers (haruspices), and the Greeks their witches; the latter flew nightly through the air, just like the witches of later times. Charlemagne forbade the burning of witches, a practice common to the heathen Saxons of Germany in his day, and Mother Church seems later to have reverted to that heathen custom.

After the before-mentioned bull of Innocent VIII. was published, a maxim of the priests was that "the greatest heresy is not to believe in witches." (4)

What was a witch?

"A monster, an aerolite, come from nobody knows where." (5)

There is a more precise definition given by Carpov. (6).

He divides dealers in magic into five classes.

1. Wizards (praestigiatores).

These are such people, who through exorcisms and frauds, seek to delude men into the belief that they see things which do not exist, or cannot see things which stand clearly before their eyes.

3. Michelet "*La Sorcière*."

4. "*Malleus Maleficarum*" (Hammer for Witches).

5. Michelet "*La Sorcière*."

6. Benedict Carpov (1596-1666) was a writer on law. Held high office at Dresden and Leipsic.

2. Seers (haruspices).

These prophesy out of the course and position of the stars. They observe day and hour, also they are able to behold future events out of the entrails of animals.

3. Venefici, a class of wizard, who through godless sayings, unholy signs, imprecations, through devilish herbs and brews, prepare ruin and death to animals and men.

4. Witches.

These are able to conjure up bad weather, storms, hail and thunder. They prepare the downfall and ruin of man. They have conferences with the devil, to whom they travel on oven forks, sticks, besoms, and other things, in order to have unlawful connection with the devil.

5. Last of all are the Necromancers.

Against these formidable creatures, then, was the papal bull fulminated; and in England, the Statute, "*De Haeretico Comburendo*," was more particularly directed.

In Germany, on the night before May day, witches used to travel to the Brocken, on broomsticks, he-goats and hay forks, and it is said that to-day, farmers living near the Hartz Mountain, and in other parts of Thuringia, put crosses over their barns to prevent their cows being bewitched by the flying sorceress.

Goethe gives an example of a witch flight and assembly (in "*Faust*"), beginning:—

"The witches to the Brocken go."

The witches assembled on the Blocksberg, "*qui praestigiosam formam hirci, porci, vituli et similes animalis induunt*," (7) and there had conference with the devil, and also illicit intercourse. "*Es war allgemein feststehender Glaube, dass den Hexen der Geschlechtsakt mit dem Teufel mehr Spass bereitete, als der mit Männern*." (8)

When a woman entered into a bond with the devil, she was obliged to abjure her Christian belief, and profess that of the devil; she must renounce God, Christ, Our Lady, and all the saints. Afterwards, a mark was placed on her body (*stigma diaboli*), and then only could she take part in the assemblies. The reverential greeting to the devil consisted in kissing his left foot, "*den After und die Genitalien*," (9) (the "feudal kiss," Michelet calls it). In France, the witches' assembly was held on the moor, and often near an old Celtic *dolmen*. (10)

7. Carpov.

8. Müller "*Hexenprozesse*."

9. Müller "*Hexenprozesse*."

10. Michelet "*La Sorcière*."

The first act was the denial of Christ, homage to the new master, followed by the "feudal kiss." Then came the banquet of strange potions, followed by the famous "*ronde du Sabbat*," the witches dancing back to back, and a curious thing was that they did not know one another, and "by a miracle of Satan, the old were no longer old."¹¹

The host was distributed in a blasphemous form, in fact, the "black mass" was celebrated.

"In derision of the words, *Agnus Dei*, and the breaking of the Christian Host, she (the witch) had a toad dressed up, brought to her, and she pulled it to pieces. She rolled her eyes terribly, turned them towards the sky, and whilst she was cutting off the head of the toad, said these singular words: "Ah, Philip (^A) if I had thee, I would do just the same to thee."¹²

The third act, we are told, was like a kermesse of Rubens, "a very confused orgie," and "the most monstrous acts were committed before everybody."¹³

The devil appears in various forms—in "Faust" he took the shape of a poodle,—and his names are many, ranging from Beelzebub to Mephistopheles. "According to Catholic theorems, he is a mere spirit, commonly represented under the symbolic picture of a man, with dragon wings, the movements of a snake, the claws of a lion, goat-footed, and masked faced."¹⁴

Repulsive creatures are his companions and emblems—snakes, rats, spiders, and toads, and these are also the companions of witches. Now, it will be of interest to know what were the precise arguments advanced for the destruction of witches.

Carpzov supplies these arguments, as follows:—

"1. God Himself has uttered a curse against Witchcraft.

"2. Old states have declared against Witchcraft.

"3. Civil law is against.

"4. Many writers have declared against.

"5. For the benefit of the witches themselves, since only by death will they be released from the bonds of Satan."

But the Inquisition left scant room for the jurisdiction of a Civil Court, as the book, "*Malleus Maleficarum*" evidences. The jurisdiction of the Inquisition was ecclesiastical and legal, and the methods of securing victims were:—

1. By receiving public complaints or denunciations.

2. By anonymous denunciations.

If neither of these was forthcoming, then victims were seized on mere suspicion.

11. Michelet "*La Sorcière*."

A. Jesus Christ is meant.

12. Michelet "*La Sorcière*."

13. Michelet "*La Sorcière*."

14. Einzinger "*Damonologie*."

The Inquisition travelled from place to place, and no vestal of ancient Rome could have been more vigilant in keeping the sacred fire burning.

A denunciation was mostly equivalent to a death sentence, and very many victims made confessions when under torture. Strict proof that a person was a witch (or a wizard) could never, of course, be produced; at the most, circumstantial evidence that the accused had looked with an evil eye on a cow, or had a black cat, or was old and wrinkled, was sufficient, but a contumacious prisoner (*i.e.*, one who denied the charges) was sent to the torture chamber, to enable the Inquisitors to extract a confession. As to the methods, "the nursery tales of the torments of hell have here been realised."

A description from Scherr¹⁵ is typical of the general process. A woman is accused of witchcraft, and put to the torture. She is bound to a ladder, and drawn upwards by the hands, which are bound behind her back. Besides this, the thumbscrews are applied, but in spite of the fearful pain, the witch does not confess.

After some time, they proceed to a new method of torture. They cut away her hair, pour spirits on her head, and set fire to it.

Further, they throw feathers (covered with brimstone and lighted), under her arms and on her neck, and draw her up again by the hands.

For four entire hours she is thus treated, and even then she confesses nothing. Midday has come, and the executioner and his assistants go to dinner, whilst the unhappy woman is left in her terrible pain.

When they come back, satisfied and rested, the process begins anew. This time, they bind the hands and feet of the witch together, then pour spirits on to her back, set fire to it, and then load with heavy weights the burnt back. Hereupon the executioner fastens the rope (that hangs down from the roof) to the bound hands and feet, and in this manner draws up the witch. After some time she is let down.

Now, they again lay her on a ladder, push under her back a plank studded with nails, and pull her up by her hands to the roof; whilst on her feet a 50lbs. weight is hung.

Still the witch will not confess, and now the executioner puts on her the "Spanish boots," screws them up until the blood spurts round about; besides this, he applies the thumbscrews," and so on.

Dr. Hennen¹⁶ describes the process of torture applied at Treves in 1572, but all were arranged with the object of extracting confession. The prisoner was also stripped, and had to submit to other indignities in order that her jailors might search for the

15. "Geschichte deutscher Kultur und Sitte."

16. "Kulturgeschichte des Mosellandes."

diabolic mark on her body; priests also came into the cell, who sought to extract some fatal admission from, or inveigle, the accused by some sort of chicanery.

Finally, the prisoner was brought before the Judge, and by this time, as will be seen, the process was simple and judgment certain. Article 109, of Charles V., Rules of the Court concerning punishment by death, reads: "Punishment of Witchcraft. Anyone who through witchcraft, causes injury or similar detriment, to the people, shall be punished from life to death, and shall be punished with fire."¹⁷

When the sentence was decided upon, the Judge laid a copy of it before each jurymen, and said: "What is the law on this point?" and the jurymen answered according to the Criminal Code. Then, after pronouncing the death sentence, the Judge broke his staff, and handing over the prisoner to the executioner, told the latter to well and truly perform his office. The Judge also made a public announcement, that no blame was to attach to the executioner for fulfilling his duty.

For even protesting against this Witch Crusade many were burnt, among others the following: The Abbot of St. Martin, the Deans of Pfalzel and Waldbruch, the Vicars of Büdelich and Beschied, and the Chaplain of Trittenheim.

The three following, are selected as specimens of sentences pronounced on witches and wizards at Leipzig:—¹⁸

I.

September, 1584.

G. V. V., having, by virtue of our previous sentence, been put to the torture, it has been made known that she, the lawful wives of Paul Zeiger and Thos. Schneider, through witchcraft and in the devil's name has injured; also the lawful wife of George Spanden has bewitched, so that she by this time is quite withered; also that the latter person, according to a report, has died of such illness, and as death was approaching, she was calling out the name of the prisoner. Likewise, has the Inquisition made known that she (the prisoner) has caused a man to go blind for a time, merely because he once cursed her. Further, she has confessed that she, for 7 or 8 years, has had illicit intercourse with a devil named Juncker Hanss.

Since you now should have already enquired, or would once more enquire, that the above-named persons have certainly been injured in their health; and the prisoner has been, on her own confession, before the Court, rightly convicted; so let her, on account of such well-known witchcraft, be punished, according to

the severity of the law, with fire, from life to death.

V.R.W.

II.

March, 1586.

The prisoner I. K. has, under torture made known and pronounced, that he has bound himself to the devil—body and soul—and has promised that the devil may take him when the latter so desires.

Further, that he (the prisoner) through wizardry, has injured in the body, the lawful wives of the Vicar of Leubnitz, Andreas Schirmen, of Kesseldorf, and Bernard Asmussen, the Vicar of Lehmann; and that against Matthew Schirmen, of Seidewitz has, through wizardry, and by tempest, set fire to his house and farm.

And it has also been found on enquiry that the above-mentioned persons have been injured in body and health, in an unexpected way, and that the house and farm of Matthew Schirmen have been set fire to and burnt down. Since, therefore, the above-mentioned I.K. has, on his own confession, before the Court, been rightly convicted. So let him, on account of his bond with the devil, and on account of the wizardry he has practised, be punished with fire, from life to death.

V.R.W.

III.

June, 1593.

Although the prisoner, R. R., under torture, on the authority of our previous sentence, has not confessed to any witchcraft, but she has nevertheless, after the torture, said that she, at the age of 12 years, had had illicit intercourse with the bad enemy, and that from such connection, goblins were born, of which she had sent two to a daughter of Orthein, and had given two to a dog in a bit of bread, from which a violent and continuous cough had originated.

Since you now should have already enquired, or would once more enquire, that the above-named daughter of Orthein certainly has been injured; and the prisoner, R. R., was, on her own confession before the Court, rightly convicted, so let her on account of such well-known misdeeds, be punished with fire, from life to death.

V.R.W.

Many curious tales are told of the power of witches to transform women into wolves. Boquet relates, "that in the mountains of Auvergne, a hunter fired, on a certain night, on a wolf; missed, but cut away a paw. The wolf went limping away. The hunter then went to a neighbouring chateau, to ask for the hospitality of the owner who lived there. The latter, on seeing the hunter, asked

17. Müller, "Hexenprozesse."
18. Müller, "Hexenprozesse."

if he had been successful in the chase. To reply to that question, he was about to take out of his game bag the paw that he had cut off from the wolf; but what was his surprise to find, in place of a paw, a hand, and on one of the fingers a ring, that the owner of the chateau recognised as that of his wife. He immediately went to her, and found her wounded and hiding her fore-arm. That arm had no hand; they fitted on what the hunter had brought back, and the lady was compelled to admit that it was indeed she, who under the form of a wolf, had attacked the hunter, and had saved herself in leaving behind a paw on the field of battle.

The husband had the cruelty to hand his wife over to justice, and she was burnt.¹⁹

Then there was that monstrous ghoul, Gilles de Ritz,²⁰ who was burnt at Nantes in 1440 for sacrificing 150 children (whom he had enticed into his castle) to his sorceries. When a boy, de Ritz was a page at Court, and took part in the terrible witches' Sabbath, at the abbey of St. Denis, when the King (Charles VI.) gave a ball in celebration of Duguesclin. "There, all these great ladies (land-owners in their own right), unbridled Jezebels, less modest than men, did not deign to disguise themselves. Their sensual fury, their mad ostentatious debauchery, their outrageous defiance, were for everyone, for the King, for all—for the sense, the body, life, soul—the abyss and the bottomless pit."²¹

It is worth while recalling the fact that the King, later on, fell a victim to one of his mad pranks. At a fête, he and four companions in pleasure, covered themselves with tow and resin to imitate beasts, and growling like their prototypes, came lurching into the festive hall. The Duke of Orleans, in a joke, and not foreseeing the terrible effects which followed, set fire to one of the "animals," and, inasmuch as these same animals (including the King) were chained together, the result was soon evident—five burning creatures.

The Duchess of Berri had the presence of mind to throw a cloak over the King, and he alone was saved—the others perished miserably in their tow and resin. The King became mad.

Soldan²² relates an example of the luminous reasoning of a witch judge. A woman admitted having dug up the body of a child, recently buried, in order to use the same for her magic compositions. But her husband said, "Go to the Cemetery, the child is still there." And sure enough the body was there. But the judge decided, contrary to the evidence of his own eyes, that it was

19. Michelet "La Sorcière."

20. Marstat of France, 1420.

21. Michelet "La Sorcière."

22. "Histoire des procès de sorcellerie."

an appearance, an illusion of the devil, and he preferred the admission of the woman to the fact itself. She was burnt.

The Parliament of Toulouse condemned to be burnt together 400 human beings "Let one judge of the horror, of the black smoke of so much flesh, of fat, which under piercing cries and howlings, make a horrible bubble. Execrable and nauseous sight, which had not been seen since the broiling and the roasting of the Albigenes."²³

In the Basque Provinces, thousands of people were infested with witch madness in 1610. The witches exercised an incredible power. "A number of persons, believing themselves victims of witchcraft, became really and seriously ill; many were struck with epilepsy, and barked like dogs. The little town of Acqs alone included 40 of these unfortunate barkers."²⁴

Eight priests were charged with wizardry and other offences, the Bishop of Bayonne in fright left his diocese, and many witches and wizards were burnt before the tumult was quelled. Louis Gaufridi, a priest (called the prince of magicians) was held to be responsible for the demoniacal possession that seized the nuns of St. Baume, in 1612; the nuns of Loudon became infected, a nun called Madeleine Bavent had ecstatic trances in 1643, and the Jesuits themselves were mixed up in these odious transactions. Finally, it may be worth while to relate the story of Urbain Grandier. He was born at Rover, near Sable, educated at the Jesuit College, Bordeaux, and appointed curé of St. Pierre-du-Marche and Prebendary of the Church of St. Croix.

His rapid promotion excited the jealousy of his confrères, and when he attacked certain methods of convent government, he incurred the hatred of the priests, still further to be accentuated when he gained a law suit against the Chapter of St. Croix.

His enemies now accused him of impiety, but after many struggles, he triumphed, and then they had to resort to a more serious charge.

Two magistrates were called to the Convent of Loudon to examine a nun called Mignon, who was said to be possessed of a demon, named Astaroth; and this was the examination, Astaroth replying through the mouth of the Superior:—

Propter quam causam ingressus es in corpus hujus virginis?
(Why have you entered into the body of this girl?)

23. Michelet "La Sorcière."

24. Michelet "La Sorcière."

Causa animositas. (Through animosity.)

Per quod pactum? (By what means?)

Per flores. (By means of flowers.)

Quales? (What flowers?)

Rosas. (Roses.)

Quis misit? (Who sent you?)

Urbanus. (Urbain.)

Dic cognomen? (Tell his surname.)

Grandier.

Dic qualitatem? (Tell his position.)

Sacerdos. (Priest.)

Cujus ecclesiæ? (Of what church?)

Sancti-Petri. (St. Peter.)²⁵

Immediately after this, Mignon said to the magistrates that this case was similar to that of the priest Gauffridi who had been burnt at Aix.

The magistrates, who saw through the deception, went away, and for a time the exorcisms ceased. They soon recommenced; a further examination took place, and this time we are told, the assessor was displeased because the demon answered Jesus-Christus (instead of the accusative Jesum-Christum). However, when it was proposed to ask the questions in Greek or Scotch, the demon declined any more risks of grammatical pitfalls.

All sorts of means were tried to ensnare Urbain Grandier, but without success, and the Superior of the Convent then blamed Mignon for trying to ruin the convent.

But chance came to the aid of Grandier's enemies, as Cardinal Richelieu sent Laubardemont to demolish the fortress of Loudon at this time. It so happened that he (Laubardemont) was a relative of the Superior of the Convent, that a woman called Hamon had published a satire against the Cardinal, that Hamon had known Grandier; thereupon all the accusations against Grandier were resuscitated with tenfold fury, and resulted in Richelieu authorising Laubardemont to enquire into the reason of the demoniacal possession of the Ursuline nuns, and Grandier was charged with being the author.

Still, nothing could be proved against Grandier, and the prior who had first accused him presented himself, one day, to the Court, wearing only a shirt, with a card round his neck, and confessed on his bended knees that he had accused an innocent man.

Nevertheless, resolved on his death, the Commissioners appointed by Laubardemont condemned Grandier to death. When the latter heard his sentence, he said: "Gentlemen, I call to wit-

25. "Souvestre, Des Promenades Matinales."

ness God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and the Virgin, my only advocate, that I have never been a magician, that I have never committed sacrilege, that I know no other magic than that of the Holy Scriptures."

When Grandier was at the stake, Father Lachance, an enemy, handed him a red hot crucifix to kiss, but he recoiled and then, Lachance said: "See, he cannot bear the approach of the holy token."

The last words of Grandier were: "*Deus meus ad te vigilo, misereri mei Deus.*"

The above account is that of Emile Souvestre, but the version of Michelet is somewhat different. Michelet says, "I am against the burners, but by no means for the burnt. . . . He (Grandier) was a fop, vain, a libertine, who deserved, not the stake, but perpetual imprisonment."

F. LEONARD.

POETRY AND ITS OPPORTUNITY.

POETRY is the attempt to pass behind the surface, and see things in the light of eternity, *sub specie aeternitatis*. And he who opens a new door or window, however humble, into this wonderland should surely be praised for the attempt. A few succeed and bring back a good report from the better world, and make earth brighter for the vision they have seen. In an effete Society like the present, a society of week-end parties and desecrated Sundays and gambling, though blessed by great persons, we ought to be grateful for any effort in a higher direction. The best commentary on the period, with its glorified vice and squalid magnificence, is the fact that thousands and tens of thousands of honest men and women are under-fed and under-clothed and over-worked or unemployed, and children are starving, while England does nothing for them, though other countries have found remedies. Poetry, in one chief elemental aspect, comes forward as a protest against the disharmonies of life. It assures us, with unfaltering tones, that Beauty and Truth, and even Love, do really exist, and (if in some places and at some times they appear only to be for the benefit of the upper classes, as toys and trifles among many more), yet nevertheless exist in the service and for the interests of all, especially the sad and suffering. Poetry means a return to Nature, to such fundamental facts as this—that God reigns and rules, not merely *de jure* but also *de facto*, and in spite of appearances to the contrary, still over-rules. There can be no better way of looking at things, at everything, and not least at the sin and sorrow of the world than this—to see the particular in the category of the universal, and all as interpreted by the Cross of Christ. What the working classes demand now, though they may be ignorant of their need, is not statesmen or representatives in Parliament, or gallant pioneers, but a Poet, who as one of themselves knows their feelings and famished lives, and can set them to immortal song, even if translated simply into the rude, crude, nude vernacular in its rough and ready starving strength. The good work that Ebenezer Elliott did for the Corn Laws, in his red-hot Rhymes, has to be done over again now at a similar crisis in our history, when reaction threatens us, in virile verse by some.